



MEMORANDUM

To: Bicycle and Pedestrian Task Force

From: CMAP Staff

Date: December 2015

Re: Regional Greenways and Trails Plan Update

CMAP is in the process of updating its regional trails plan. The current Northeastern Illinois Greenways and Trails Plan, adopted by the CMAP Board and MPO Policy Committee in 2009, is a long-range, multi-jurisdictional plan that presents a vision for a network of multi-use trails and greenways across the region. The forthcoming update will take advantage of the latest data on completed trails as well as the vision embodied in subregional trail plans created over the past six years. The 2009 Regional Greenways and Trails Plan in many cases relied on data of an older vintage. This project will update the plan by revisiting previously proposed trails to ensure they are still valid recommendations, making any technical corrections needed, such as altering alignments, and proposing new multi-use trail linkages where appropriate.

Background on Regional Greenways and Trails Plan

Originally completed in 1992 and updated in 1997 and in 2009, the [Northeastern Illinois Regional Greenways and Trails Plan](#) sets out a vision for an interconnected network of stream- and land-based green corridors and 2,700 miles of multi-use trails throughout the seven-county region. The plan envisions a network of continuous greenway and trail corridors, linked across jurisdictions, providing scenic beauty, natural habitat, and recreational and transportation opportunities. The plan includes two main components: conceptual alignments for the planned trail and greenway network, and an accompanying text that lays out values, goals, objectives, and recommended actions. The regional trails plan assists implementers and funding agencies in advancing their projects, as proposals that relate to the plan can be more attractive to funding agencies. It also helps serve as a guide for making connections between communities.

In addition to its role in trail planning, the 2009 plan has a broad goal of advancing greenway preservation and reducing conflicts with other development activities. The 2009 plan includes both trail greenways and stream greenways, corridors of undeveloped landscape along land or water features. The plan identifies trails that offer a “green experience” with large amounts of vegetation or scenic vistas. It also identifies stream greenways, considering buffered areas around the region’s streams and waterways.

As of 2015, a total of over 1,100 miles of an envisioned system of nearly 2,700 miles of regional trails have been completed, an increase of 160 miles since 2009 (Table 1). Approximately half of the trail mileage in the Regional Greenways and Trails Plan is on greenway corridors.

Table 1. Regional Trails Plan Implementation, 2009-2015

| County | Completed Trails System Miles, 2009 | Completed Trails System Miles, 2015 | Percent of Regional Trails Element Complete, 2009 | Percent of Regional Trails Element Complete, 2015 |
|---------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| Cook | 294 | 350 | 40% | 47% |
| DuPage | 192 | 208 | 69% | 75% |
| Grundy (Part) | 9 | 9 | 75% | 75% |
| Kane | 146 | 153 | 37% | 40% |
| Kendall | 17 | 22 | 7% | 9% |
| Lake | 158 | 189 | 45% | 54% |
| McHenry | 60 | 65 | 31% | 33% |
| Will | 121 | 166 | 24% | 33% |
| Total | 998 | 1162 | 37% | 43% |

Trails plan

The primary deliverables for the Greenways and Trails Plan update will be an updated map of planned multi-use trails for northeastern Illinois as well as a policy memo. A text update to the plan is not envisioned for this project. The process for updating the greenways and trails plan will involve three main phases:

- **Phase 1:** Scoping and data review (October - December 2015)
- **Phase 2:** Stakeholder input on trail recommendations (December 2015 -June 2016)
- **Phase 3:** Map development and review (June - October 2016)

The chief means of identifying plan priorities will be direct individual discussion with the counties, forest preserve and conservation districts, councils of mayors and governments, and any other regional stakeholders that have created bikeway and trail plans. Through these discussions, previously proposed trails will be evaluated to ensure they are still valid recommendations and technical corrections such as revised alignments will be considered. New linkages will be recommended as appropriate. CMAP staff will carry out advance work to identify needed changes in the regional trail map; where changes are minor, staff will try to correspond with subregional partners by email and phone to reduce the number of meetings necessary.

The CMAP Bicycle and Pedestrian Task Force will be an important forum for seeking guidance on the project. Task force members will be asked to provide feedback on project direction, plan progress, and the updated map, with regular discussion at Task Force meetings. A draft map is expected for consideration by the Task Force at its June 2016 meeting. It is ultimately expected that the trails plan update will be presented for adoption by CMAP’s governing boards, most likely as part of the overall regional comprehensive plan adoption process in 2018. However, the plan could be used by local partners even with draft status until then.

Policy and planning directions

Overall, this project is envisioned as an update with few major changes to the product concept itself. However, a number of items are worth consideration by the Task Force at the outset:

- **Concept of a regional trail:** The 2009 plan described regional trails as “multi-jurisdictional facilities offering recreational opportunities and transportation uses, connecting communities and greenways throughout the region.” One consideration is that this concept may need to be made more specific to ensure clarity and to include the appropriate scale of project.
- **Treatment of greenways:** The region’s understanding of greenways and green infrastructure has grown more sophisticated since adoption of the current plan in 2009. In that plan, greenways were mostly simple buffers along surface water. Chicago Wilderness has now mapped a Green Infrastructure Vision for the greater Chicago area as have several counties at a smaller scale. The trails plan update will attempt to integrate this improved knowledge into its findings, for instance by elevating the importance of trails that carry co-benefits as greenways. It will also be mindful of the sensitivity of greenways, not all of which are appropriate locations for trails.
- **Connection to regional comprehensive plan.** Because stakeholders have indicated that the trails map was the most useful part of the 2009 plan, this plan update will not include a separate policy-oriented text. Rather, it will inform a memo with policy directions for the next regional comprehensive plan.
- **Water trails:** There is growing interest in water trails planning in the region, as reflected in the Northeast Illinois Water Trails Plan. Some consideration should be given to how the trails plan can incorporate water trails.

Action requested: Discussion